



SUBSCRIBER TOOLKIT

Built for real school days

THE SCIENCE OF READING

Leaderships Questions and Tips for Schools

Purpose of this guide: The Science of Reading is a body of interdisciplinary research on how students learn to read, and which instructional practices produce the strongest outcomes. For leaders, it provides a clear model to align curriculum, professional learning, and classroom walkthroughs.

To become strong readers, students must develop skills in these areas:

- 1. Phonemic awareness:** Identify and manipulate sounds in spoken language
- 2. Phonics:** Connect sounds to letters and spelling patterns
- 3. Fluency:** Read accurately, with expression, at an efficient rate
- 4. Vocabulary:** Know word meanings and build knowledge
- 5. Comprehension:** Make meaning, talk and write about text

Effective reading instruction must be both systematic and explicit.

Systematic instruction

Teaching follows a planned scope and sequence from simple to complex, with frequent review and cumulative practice.

Explicit instruction

The teacher models the skill, guides practice with feedback, and releases students to independent work.

So what for principals and superintendents

When Tier 1 literacy routines are inconsistent, intervention cannot close the gap. Leaders protect uninterrupted instructional time, align materials and routines across classrooms, and create a feedback loop that improves teaching quickly.

Questions to Ask and What to Look For

Use during curriculum reviews, coaching meetings and classroom walkthroughs

QUESTIONS TO ASK

WHAT TO LOOK FOR/LISTEN FOR

Core Instruction and Materials

- What are the essential skills students must master this quarter?
- Where is the scope and sequence, and how is it used to plan daily lessons?
- Which core program and decodable texts are used, and how is fidelity monitored?

- Instruction reflects a clear sequence, daily review, and explicit routines.
- Teachers use aligned materials and shared language across classrooms.
- Students practice the targeted skill with immediate feedback

Assessment and Progress monitoring

- Which screening and diagnostic measures are used, and when?
- How do we know which students are on track, and which skills are not mastered?
- How often is progress monitored for students below the benchmark?

- Data connects to specific skills and is reviewed weekly or biweekly.
- Grouping changes within two weeks when students are not making growth.
- Teachers can name the skill focus for each student receiving support.

Support and Intervention

- What is the intervention schedule, and what is protected from interruptions?
- Which interventions target the exact skill gap?
- How do we prevent students from cycling without growth?

- Extra time is targeted to the deficit, with modeling and guided practice.
- Progress monitoring is frequent, and instruction changes quickly.
- Intervention moves are documented, and outcomes are reviewed.

Staff Learning and Coaching

- What training have teachers completed, and what is the ongoing coaching plan?
- How do new staff learn routines and the sequence quickly?
- What is the feedback loop from walkthrough to coaching to improved instruction?

- Coaching cycles are short: observe, feedback, practice, re-observe.
- Leaders calibrate look fors using common examples and rubrics.
- Walkthrough notes lead to a specific next step for teachers.

Leader Actiona to Strengthen Literacy Systems

A practical 30, 60, 90 day implementation and monitoring

Did you know...

Strong reading skills unlock access to every subject area. When reading routines are consistent, students engage with grade-level content sooner, and gaps shrink faster.

Mathematics

Supports word problems and multi step directions.

Science:

Accesses procedures, concepts and vocabulary

Social Studies

Analyze sources and write with evidence.

Tier 1 system moves (schoolwide)

- Protect uninterrupted literacy time daily.
- Use a shared scope and sequence, and verify it shows up in lesson plans.
- Calibrate routines across classrooms, common teacher moves, and language.
- Run weekly walkthroughs focused on one look for.
- Schedule coaching cycles, observe, feedback, practice, re-observe.
- Check the fidelity of decodables and aligned texts when teaching foundational skills.

Targeted acceleration (not on track)

- Use diagnostic skill data to identify the exact gap.
- Provide additional time with explicit, systematic routines.
- Monitor progress frequently, regroup quickly within two weeks.
- Coordinate tutoring or after-school supports with the same skill focus.
- Document intervention moves, student response, and next step.
- Partner with families with simple at-home practice guidance.